



Congress of the United States

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Congressmen Take Lead to Strengthen Congressional Accountability Act
Shays, Cooper, Castle, Frank introduce
Congressional Accountability Enhancement Act

Washington, D.C. - A bipartisan group of legislators took the lead today to bring Congress under the same laws by which it regulates the private sector. The legislation is a statement that if a law is good enough for the private sector, it is good enough for Congress.

Congressmen Christopher Shays (R-CT), Jim Cooper (D-TN), Mike Castle (R-DE) and Barney Frank (D-MA) today introduced the Congressional Accountability Enhancement Act, which strengthens the rights and protections for employees of Congress first provided in 1995 under the Congressional Accountability Act

"The Congressional Accountability Act made huge leaps forward in bringing Congress under the laws the private sector has to live by," Shays explained. "But over the last nine years we have seen there is still work to do. As it is now, Congress could legally fire an employee for serving jury duty, punish a whistleblower or discriminate against a bankrupt employee," Shays said. "The bottom line is, Congress cannot be above the law, and we will write better laws when we live by the laws we write."

"This bill closes a number of gaps in the law that should have been closed with the original legislation," Cooper said. "In fact, I would say that most Americans would be surprised that Congress is currently exempt from some of the more obvious and basic protections that we require private sector workers ---- as well as every federal agency --- to extend to their employees. That needs to change."

“Just as Congress must be accountable to the public in our spending habits, it is equally important that we are accountable to the public in the way we act and run our offices,” Castle explained. “Congress should not be viewed as a privileged body, but rather an institution that is subject to the same laws we have placed on the private sector and an institution that genuinely cares for our employees. This legislation is long overdue and I urge Congress to swiftly pass it -- so the American taxpayers know that we do not view ourselves above the law.”

Frank added, “Three hundred and fifty years ago John Locke argued that one requirement for decent government is that those that make the laws be fully subject to them. The bill we introduce today is based on the view that this principle should still hold.”

The Congressional Accountability Enhancement Act strengthens CAA, which brought Congress under 11 labor and employment laws from which it had previously been exempt. CAA (PL 104-1), which Shays introduced in 1995, passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 429 to 0.

After living under the law for nine years, it is clear CAA is incomplete. The Congressional Accountability Enhancement Act seeks to fill in the blanks by:

- Bringing Congress under Title II of the Civil Rights Act, prohibiting discrimination in places of public accommodation based on race, color, religion or national origin;
- Providing whistleblower protection;
- Providing equal access for the disabled to all electronic information; and
- Prohibiting discrimination or termination for those who serve on a jury, have declared bankruptcy or whose wages are garnished for debt.

These protections were suggested in the 2002 Section 102 (b) reports written by the Board of Directors of the Office of Compliance, the independent agency established by CAA.

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